16 May 1997



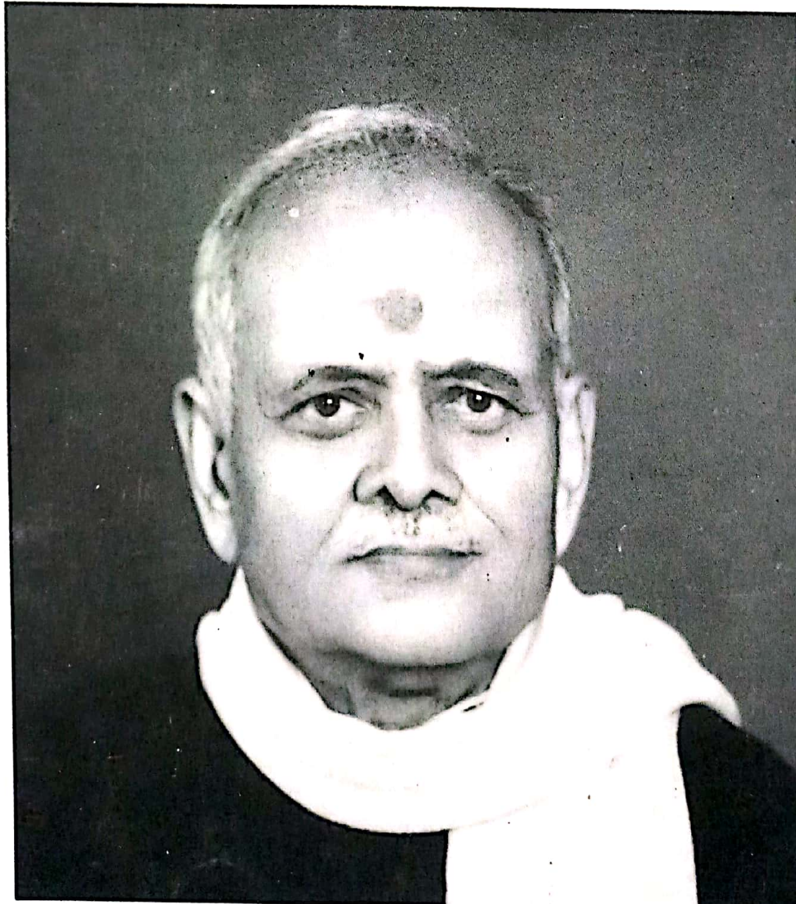
Sahitya Akademi

in collaboration with

All India Maithili Sahitya Parishad

meet the author

Upendra Nath Jha 'Vyas'





Upendra Nath Jha 'Vyas' is a distinguished novelist and poet of modern Maithili, a fine translator and a litterateur with a sense of dedication all through his literary career spanning nearly six decades.

Born on 16 July 1917 at Haripur Bakshi Tole in the district of Madhubani in Bihar, 'Vyas' had his early education in his village, then at Rajnagar and finally at the Bihar College of Engineering, Patna. An engineering graduate (1942) he had his specialization in the design of re-inforced concrete structure.

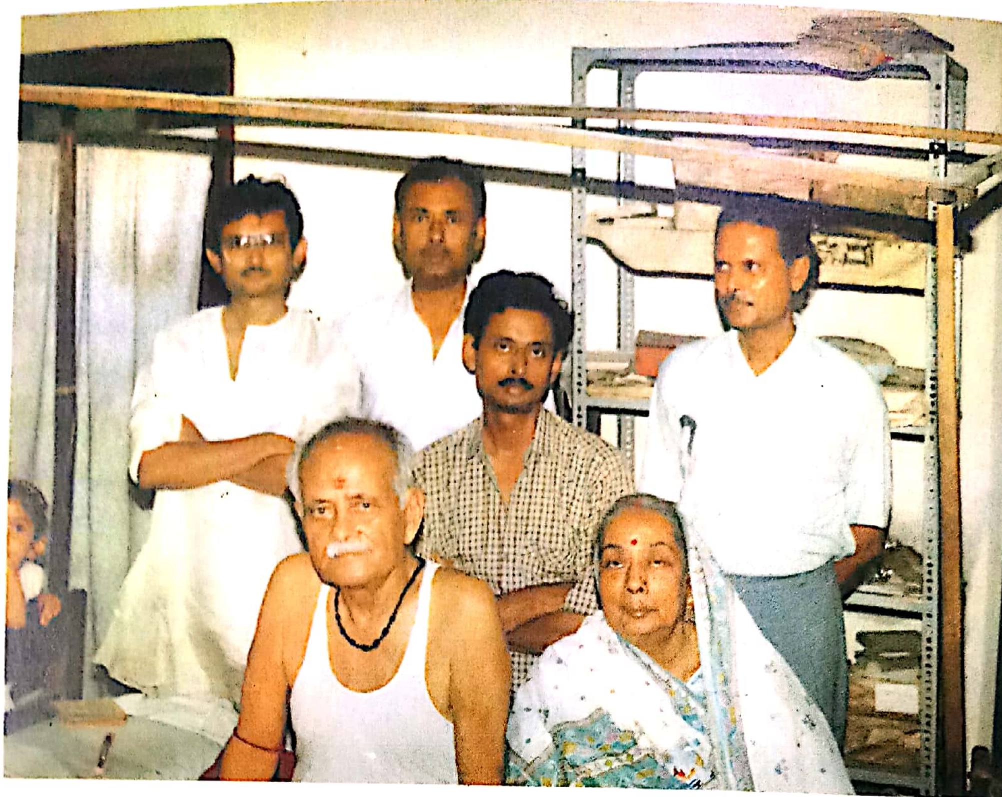
Inspired as far back as in the late thirties by Ramanath Jha's *Sahitya Patra,* 'Vyas' decided to dedicate himself to the service of his mother-tongue, Maithili. He launched his literary career in 1939 with a one hundred and seventy line long poem, *Vidyapatik Mrityu.* This was followed by *Sannyasi,* a long poem, a number of short stories and his significant novel *Kumar.*

Even while facing the challenges of professional career as an engineer, he managed to sustain his life as a fictionist, poet and translator. For, it was during this time that he wrote the Akademi award-winning novel *Du Patra* (Two letters), the celebrated long poem *Patan,* a number of fascinating short stories and translated Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyats.*

Du Patra is a novelette complete in only two letters depicting the emotional crises of two young women, one Indian and the other American. The first letter is written by Indu Devi to her husband Surendra who has gone to the USA for higher studies and has been staying there for the last ten years. Ramesh, Indu's cousin who also goes to the States later, sees how Surendra, enamoured of western ways of living, is involved in a love affair with a good girl named Jessica. The reply that Ramesh gets from Jessica is the second letter.

The first letter depicts the feelings and sentiment of an educated lady born and brought up in Indian-Maithili tradition, and is written at a time when her husband asks from the far-off land that she too should agree to the proposed divorce. In the second letter we find the thoughts and anguish of an American girl who is really in love with the Americanised Surendra, but is now seized with the problems arising out of the peculiar situation. Jessica is deeply impressed by the innate sincerity and unsophisticated behaviour of Ramesh and through his association, comes to know something about Hindu religion, culture and ways of life.

In this novel are presented two social pictures— one Indian-Maithili and another American.



With wife and sons

The author's analysis has been objective and both patterns of life have been judged in the light of ultimate human values. Lives of male characters, particularly that of Surendra, the hero, are unfolded most realistically and the depiction of female characters is emotionally touching and pathetic, morally convincing and ennobling. The language is simple but chaste and charged with emotional fervour. The story woven around the four characters— Indu, Surendra, Ramesh and Jessica— is presented in a straight-forward and convincing manner with utmost economy of words making it an artistic creation of perfect design.

'Vyas' has lived in villages and seen the lives of poor and middle-class people. He has travelled far and wide, and adopted features of western literature. But he has still his roots in indigenous tradition and culture. Another significant feature of his novels, stories and poems is their rich variety— they are seldom alike or repetitive. He is realistic, yet he always has a positive view of life. He has never depicted crude or vulgar things in his work. His language is chaste, crisp and suited to the characters and things described. His knowledge of Sanskrit has enabled him to pick up the choicest words and phrases for elegance in his poems written either in classical style, blank verse or rhythmical free verse. 'Vyas' writes for *Swantah Sukhaya* (for his own pleasure).

He received the first Akademi translation prize for Maithili in 1990 for translating Saratchandra's *Biprodas*. Here Sri Jha captures with outstanding skill the flow and lucidity of the original and its range of stylistic variations. The choice of idioms and images is made with meticulous care and the overall

literary effect is one of effortless elegance. In the 90's, he has written a 1250 page Maithili *bhashya* of *Shuklayajurveda* on the basis of Upabhat and Mahidhar which has, however, not been published as yet. Presently he has undertaken to produce a verse of the Maithili *Mahabharat* in every month.

'Vyas' believes that a real piece of literature is that which gives hope to the fallen, extends sympathy to the downtrodden and elevates the soul. Decades back, in 1967, Ramanath Jha wrote in *Indian Literature :* 'Vyasji' is an indefatigable writer in Maihtili, and publishes all his books at his own cost. There is hardly any writer who is so regular in his literary activity and whose facile pen can produce poetry and prose with equal excellence.'

A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

NOVEL

KUMAR -1946
DU PATRA-1968

SHORT STORY COLLECTION

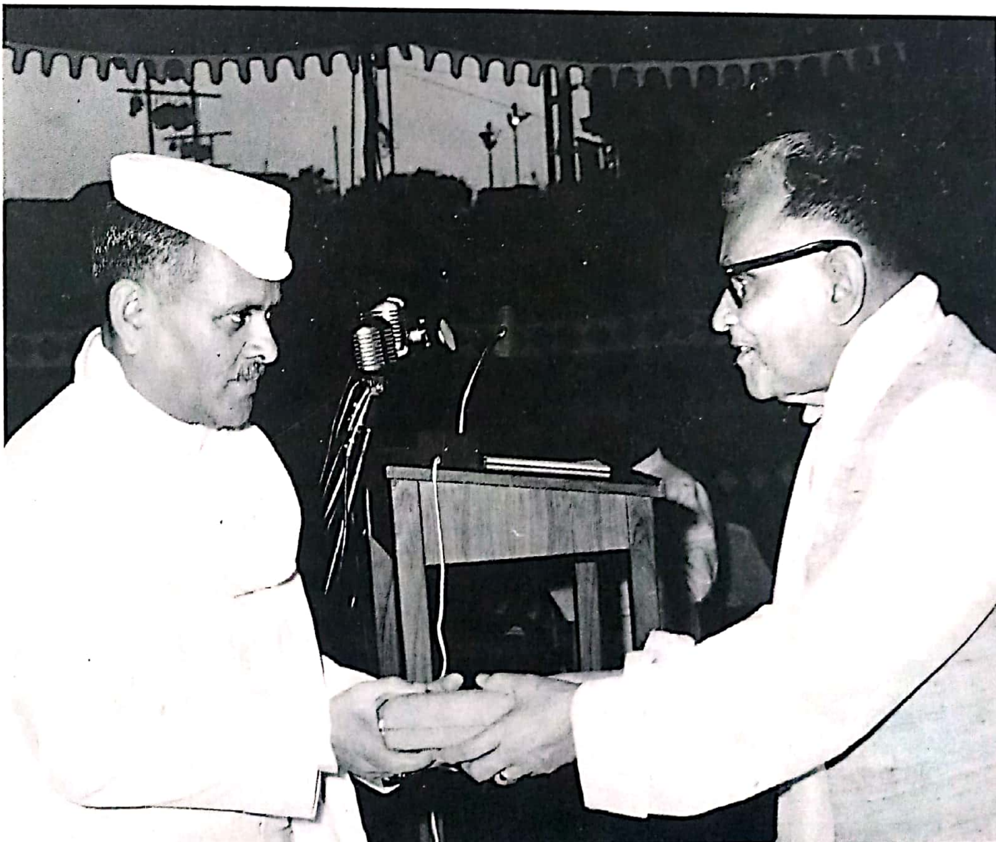
VIDAMBANA - 1952
BHAJNA BHAJLE

POETRY

SANNYASI - 1947
PATAN - 1969
PRATEEK - 1975

TRAVELOGUE

VIDESH BHRAMAN - 1978



Receiving the Sahitya Akademi Award



Receiving the Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

AKSHAR PARICHAYA - 1984

TRANSLATION

RUBAIYAT-E-OMAR KHAYYAM (Translation from the English version of Fitzgerald) - 1956

SHREEMAD BHAGAVATGEETA - 1963

BABHANAK BETI (from Saratchandra's Bengali novel *Bamuner Meye*) - 1967

BIPRODAS (from Saratchandra's Bengali novel *Biprodas*)

STOTRANJALI (translation of three long Sanskrit hymns) - 1980

SHREEKANT (First part of Saratchandra's Bengali novel *Shreekant*) - 1997

A CHRONOLOGY

1917 : Born at Haripur Bakshi



Addressing a gathering



At work

	Tole village of Madhubani district
1939 :	Composed a 170 line poem (in blank verse), *Vidyapatik Mrityu*
1942 :	Passed B.Sc. Engg (Hons) from Bihar College of Engineering, Patna
1950 :	Executive Engineer at Gowal
1958 :	Travelled seven European countries and Egypt
1960 : -64	Translated Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyats*
1967 :	*Du Patra* and *Patan* were written
1969 :	Sahitya Akademi award for *Du Patra*
1974 :	*Prateek* and *Biprodas* published
1978 : -81	Director-cum-Secretary, Maithili Akademi, Patna. *Videsh Bhraman* and *Stotranjali* published
1990 :	Awarded Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize
1993 :	Member, Maithili Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi